PREDICTABILITY AND DOMINION

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AN ECONOMIC COMMENTARY ON JOB

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Predictability and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Job

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This book is dedicated to

Paul Edgar

Who has faithfully stuck to his knitting.

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PREFACE

Now there was a day when the sons of God came to present themselves before the LORD*, and Satan came also among them. And the* LORD *said unto Satan, Whence comest thou? Then Satan answered the* LORD*, and said, From going to and fro in the earth, and from walking up and down in it. And the* LORD *said unto Satan, Hast thou considered my servant Job, that there is none like him in the earth, a perfect and an upright man, one that feareth God, and escheweth evil?*

JOB 1:6–8

A. A Strange Book

First, the format of the book is like no other in the Bible. It is a series of debates. The characters are like stage figures in a play. We hear one, then another. Most of the book is dialogue. It is not poetry, as the Psalms are. It is not aphorisms, as the Book of Proverbs is.

Because of this, I use the present tense to analyze it. In the other commentaries, I use the past tense. But the dialogue in this book forces us to think of the book as a stage play being performed in front of us.

Second, the book is also strange in terms of content. It begins with two strange chapters. I regard Job 1 and 2 as the strangest chapters theologically in the Bible. The story they tell challenges what most Christians believe about God, man, law, causation, and time. If everything that people knew about God were based on the first two chapters of Job, they would have a strange religion. On the other hand, if everything they knew about God were based on the Bible, but without the first two chapters of Job, people would have a seriously incomplete religion. Because so few Christians take seriously the Book of Job, most of them have a seriously incomplete religion.

Consider the following. "Now there was a day when the sons of God came to present themselves before the LORD, and Satan came

also among them" (v. 6). What was Satan doing in the presence of the sons of God? For that matter, who were these sons of God? Was this an assembly of all deceased redeemed males? Were angels present? What was the meeting about?

God spoke to Satan. There is no other passage in Scripture in which God speaks to Satan. In the garden, He spoke to the representative agent of Satan: the serpent. Jesus spoke to Satan in the wilderness in His office as perfect man: the second Adam.[1] Jesus quoted the Old Testament to answer Satan, as a righteous person should. He did not use power against him. Satan's religion is the power religion.

In Job 1, God cross-examines Satan. What does Satan think about Job? Job is blameless, God taunts Satan. Satan responds by saying that Job is perfect only for the sake of the benefits that he receives from God. Take away the benefits, and Job will curse God. God then lets Satan take away Job's benefits.

Then comes the description of a very bad day. Job loses almost everything. In losing almost everything, those around him do lose everything. The herds of cattle were stolen, and all the herdsmen put to death, except the messenger. The sheep were killed by fire out of heaven. So were the shepherds, save one: a messenger. The camels were stolen, and the drivers put to death, save one: a messenger.

B. Dead Servants and Children

Have you ever heard a sermon on these dead servants? No. The first chapter of Job reveals an unpleasant fact: these faithful servants died in a single day, through no fault of their own, to settle a verbal contest between God and Satan. God placed all of these men at the mercy of Satan. Did they say their prayers that morning? If so, the prayers did them no good. Did they have big dreams about the future? Of course. These dreams were snuffed out in one day. Did they trust in God because they trusted Job? Yes. That was what doomed them.

What of Job's 10 children? Satan killed them all. That would have ended Job's inheritance, had he owned anything to leave behind. He didn't. It was all gone: inheritance and heirs.

Why? To settle a verbal wager between God and Satan. "Job is good." "No, he's not." "Yes, he is." "No, he's not. I can prove it. I dare you to let me prove it." "OK, you're on." This was more like a contest between two pre-teen boys in a schoolyard than the solemn court of

1. "And so it is written, The first man Adam was made a living soul; the last Adam was made a quickening spirit" (I Cor. 15:45).

the most high God. But it *was* the solemn court of the most high God. This is where life-and-death matters get settled, once and for all.

C. God Did Not Explain

The Book of Job indicates that God never explained Himself to Job. Job never heard about the cosmic wager that led to the deaths of everyone close to him except four messengers and his embittered wife.

You have never heard a sermon on this. There is a reason for this. Pastors are unable to come to grips with the God of Job and retain their theology. This God is not the God of uplifting sermons. Uplifting sermons are what people want to hear. A preacher who ceases preaching uplifting sermons will wind up carrying front-and-back "Repent!" placards on street corners, or else selling life insurance.

D. What God Is This?

What kind of God do we deal with—really deal with? The God of Job.

I contend that until a person comes to grips with the God of Job, he does not understand the God of the Bible. That was also Rushdoony's contention. In his first book, he said that the Book of Job plagued him in his undergraduate days. He had been raised in a Christian household by a Presbyterian minister, yet he suffered from "a lack of theology and theological direction that made me helpless in the face of the contemporary scene. In the course of my thinking, it was the book of Job that gave direction to my theology."[2]

I recommend that it give direction to yours.

2. R. J. Rushdoony, *By What Standard? An Analysis of the Philosophy of Cornelius Van Til* (Vallecito, California: Ross House Books, [1959] 1995), p. 189.

INTRODUCTION

And the Lord said unto Satan, Hast thou considered my servant Job, that there is none like him in the earth, a perfect and an upright man, one that feareth God, and escheweth evil? and still he holdeth fast his integrity, although thou movedst me against him, to destroy him without cause.

JOB 2:3

A. Cursings Without Cause

This is a perplexing ethical passage. It says that Satan persuaded God to bring negative sanctions against a perfect man. God admitted that he did this without cause.

God did the same thing to Jesus.

What did God mean, "without cause"? He meant that the negative sanctions that had been imposed on Job were not in response to anything evil that Job had done.

The same was true of Jesus.

Job's children died as a result of this judgment. So did all but four messengers. Those who had perished had done nothing wrong—nothing to deserve this. Good servants perished.[1]

The same was true of Stephen and James, who were disciples of Jesus.

Job ritually sacrificed animals on behalf of his children in order to placate God's wrath. Jesus ritually sacrificed Himself on behalf of God's adopted children in order to placate God's wrath.

God allowed Satan to persecute a perfect man in order to test that man's integrity. God allowed Satan to tempt Jesus in the wilderness in

1. Those who survived had not done anything different from those who perished. They survived only because they had bad news to convey to Job.

order to test His integrity (Matt. 4;[2] Luke 4[3]).

Job suffered catastrophic negative sanctions, only to be raised even higher at the end. Jesus suffered catastrophic negative sanctions, only to be raised even higher at the end.

There are important lessons here for those who recognize them.

B. The Book's Underlying Assumption

The Book of Job rests on an assumption: *God blesses the righteous in history, and He curses the unrighteous in history*. The book makes no sense on any other assumption. The book rests on the truth of Leviticus 26 and Deuteronomy 28: the sections of the Mosaic law that deal with historical sanctions.

The Book of Job is to negative sanctions what Psalm 73 is to positive sanctions. Both books offer an initial anomaly. Job offers this one: negative sanctions for the righteous. "For he breaketh me with a tempest, and multiplieth my wounds without cause" (Job 9:17). Psalm 73 offers this one: positive sanctions for the unrighteous. "But as for me, my feet were almost gone; my steps had well nigh slipped. For I was envious at the foolish, when I saw the prosperity of the wicked" (Ps. 73:2–3). The Book of Job resolves this in the final chapter: the restoration of prosperity to the righteous. "And the LORD turned the captivity of Job, when he prayed for his friends: also the LORD gave Job twice as much as he had before" (Job 42:10). Psalm 73 also resolves this: the restoration of adversity to the unrighteous. "Surely thou didst set them in slippery places: thou castedst them down into destruction. How are they brought into desolation, as in a moment! they are utterly consumed with terrors" (Ps. 73:18–19).[4]

Again, none of this makes sense if the covenantal sanctions of Leviticus 26 and Deuteronomy 28 do not prevail in history. If historical sanctions are not predictable in terms of a person's conformity to the Bible-revealed laws of God, then the Book of Job makes no sense. Neither does Psalm 73.

It was the contention of amillennial theologian Meredith G. Kline that the covenantal sanctions of Leviticus 26 and Deuteronomy 28 no longer apply in New Covenant. He insisted that any New Testa-

2. Gary North, *Priorities and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Matthew*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2000] 2012), ch. 3.

3. Gary North, *Treasure and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Luke*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2000] 2012), ch. 4.

4. Gary North, *Confidence and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Psalms* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, 2012), ch. 19.

ment connection between visible blessings and covenant-keeping is, humanly speaking, a random coincidence. "And meanwhile it [the common grace order] must run its course within the uncertainties of the mutually conditioning principles of common grace and common curse, prosperity and adversity being experienced in a manner largely unpredictable because of the inscrutable sovereignty of the divine will that dispenses them in mysterious ways."[5] Kline was attacking Greg L. Bahnsen's book, *Theonomy in Christian Ethics* (1977).[6] He correctly saw that the heart of theonomy, as defended by Rushdoony, Bahnsen, and the other theonomists, rests on the assumption of the predictability of God's sanctions in history. As Ray Sutton made clear in *That You May Prosper: Dominion By Covenant* (1987), point four of the biblical covenant is sanctions. These sanctions are related to point three: biblical law.[7] These, in turn, are related to point five: inheritance.[8]

C. Predictability and Social Science

Predictability is basic to all science and all social theory. *Predictability is an inescapable concept*. It is never a question of predictability vs. no predictability. It is a question of what insures predictability, what kind of predictability, the degree of predictability, and in what time frame? As the priests of Philistia said,

> Now therefore make a new cart, and take two milch kine, on which there hath come no yoke, and tie the kine to the cart, and bring their calves home from them: And take the ark of the LORD, and lay it upon the cart; and put the jewels of gold, which ye return him for a trespass offering, in a coffer by the side thereof; and send it away, that it may go. And see, if it goeth up by the way of his own coast to Beth-shemesh, then he hath done us this great evil: but if not, then we shall know that it is not his hand that smote us; it was a chance that happened to us (I Sam. 6:7–9).[9]

It was not chance.

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5. Meredith G. Kline, "Comments on an Old-New Error," *Westminster Theological Journal*, XLI (Fall 1978), p. 184.

6. Greg L. Bahnsen, *Theonomy in Christian Ethics*, 3rd ed. (Nacogdoches, Texas: Covenant Media Press, 2002).

7. Ray R. Sutton, *That You May Prosper: Dominion By Covenant*, 2nd ed. (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, [1987] 1992), chaps. 3, 4. Gary North, *Unconditional Surrender: God's Program for Victory*, 5th ed. (Powder Springs, Georgia: American Vision, 2010), chaps. 4, 5.

8. Sutton, ch. 5. North, ch. 5.

9. Gary North, *Disobedience and Defeat: An Economic Commentary on the Historical Books* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, 2012), ch. 13.

For almost two millennia, Christian theologians and social thinkers have debated the issue of historical predictability. This issue is closely associated with ethics. They have come to no agreement.

The most familiar Christian theories of social causation have rested on a schizophrenic foundation: biblical law coupled with one of two schizophrenic and irreconcilable concepts of classical Greek natural law, either Platonic (Eastern Christianity) or Aristotelian (Western Christianity). With the triumph of Darwinism in the West, natural law theory was uprooted and cast aside by the intelligentsia. To the extent that natural law theory persists, it is a pre-Darwinian anachronism, one that is not well understood by its defenders. Any appeal to natural law is futile today within academia. It is as unpopular as the concept of intelligent design in nature, and for the same reason: Darwinism's commitment to cosmic impersonalism. But what can take its place? This is the crucial epistemological question facing Christian social theorists today. They avoid this question like the plague—except for the theonomists.

Conclusion

The Book of Job is about cosmic personalism. It is about *predictable historical sanctions in a world of cosmic personalism*.[10] Job did not argue for random historical sanctions. Neither did his three comforters-turned-critics. Neither did Elihu, who spoke for God. Neither did God, who also spoke for God. But Meredith G. Kline did.

10. Gary North, *Sovereignty and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Genesis* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [1982] 2012), ch. 1.

1

SANCTIONS AND PREDICTABILITY

There was a man in the land of Uz, whose name was Job; and that man was perfect and upright, and one that feared God, and eschewed evil.

JOB 1:1

The theocentric principle here is the fear of God.

A. A Perfect Man

Job was perfect, the text says. This does not mean that he had been born without original sin. Later in the book, Job refers to the sins of his youth. "For thou writest bitter things against me, and makest me to possess the iniquities of my youth" (Job. 13:26). In his maturity, however, Job is said to be perfect. God later testified to the righteousness of Job. Ezekiel announced this testimony.

> The word of the LORD came again to me, saying, Son of man, when the land sinneth against me by trespassing grievously, then will I stretch out mine hand upon it, and will break the staff of the bread thereof, and will send famine upon it, and will cut off man and beast from it: Though these three men, Noah, Daniel, and Job, were in it, they should deliver but their own souls by their righteousness, saith the Lord GOD (Ezek. 14:12–14).

Daniel was no longer in the land by this time. He had been carried off to Babylon (Dan. 1). Noah had escaped the Flood with his life and the lives of seven others. Job would have escaped, but not his wife. What would they have escaped? Negative sanctions. Why were these sanctions imposed by God? Because of widespread disobedience to the Bible-revealed laws of God.

Job was perfect. This creates a problem for interpreters. Isaiah announced: "But we are all as an unclean thing, and all our righteous-

nesses are as filthy rags; and we all do fade as a leaf; and our iniquities, like the wind, have taken us away" (Isa. 64:6). Jeremiah said: "The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked: who can know it?" (Jer. 17:9). Did these observations not apply to Job? They did not. Why not? Because Job was judicially covered. "And it was so, when the days of their feasting were gone about, that Job sent and sanctified them, and rose up early in the morning, and offered burnt offerings according to the number of them all: for Job said, It may be that my sons have sinned, and cursed God in their hearts. Thus did Job continually" (Job 1:5). Job followed the laws of sacrifice. There was no sin left uncovered. He had right standing with God. How? Because of his faith.

> Therefore we conclude that a man is justified by faith without the deeds of the law (Rom. 3:28).
>
> For it is not possible that the blood of bulls and of goats should take away sins. Wherefore when he cometh into the world, he saith, Sacrifice and offering thou wouldest not, but a body hast thou prepared me: In burnt offerings and sacrifices for sin thou hast had no pleasure (Heb. 10:4–6).

What distinguished Job from all the other men and women of faith was *the comprehensive nature of his faith*. He avoided evil, and he sacrificed on behalf of himself and his children. *He was beyond reproach*. This was the basis of God's challenge to Satan.

B. God's Challenge to Satan

"And the LORD said unto Satan, Hast thou considered my servant Job, that there is none like him in the earth, a perfect and an upright man, one that feareth God, and escheweth evil?" (Job 1:8). He was the archetype of the righteous man. *He was therefore representative of Jesus: the center of God's cosmic challenge to Satan*. Here was a man whom Satan had not corrupted.

Satan replied in terms of the Mosaic law's system of predictable sanctions. "Then Satan answered the LORD, and said, Doth Job fear God for nought? Hast not thou made an hedge about him, and about his house, and about all that he hath on every side? thou hast blessed the work of his hands, and his substance is increased in the land" (Job. 1:9–10). Job did not serve God for free. He was being paid by God. God was buying Job's allegiance: quid pro quo. Satan offered a challenge: "But put forth thine hand now, and touch all that he hath, and he will curse thee to thy face" (v. 11). God took up this challenge. "And the LORD said unto Satan, Behold, all that he hath is in thy

power; only upon himself put not forth thine hand. So Satan went forth from the presence of the LORD" (v. 12).

Satan was denying that there can be true righteousness if there is any personal benefit accruing to the righteous person. This was the argument of Immanual Kant, the premier philosopher of the modern West.[1] God accepted this challenge on behalf of Job. He chose to let Job prove that he would meet this challenge. Job met the challenge. "Then Job arose, and rent his mantle, and shaved his head, and fell down upon the ground, and worshipped, And said, Naked came I out of my mother's womb, and naked shall I return thither: the LORD gave, and the LORD hath taken away; blessed be the name of the LORD. In all this Job sinned not, nor charged God foolishly" (Job 1:20–22).

Satan had been publicly humiliated. Job proved him wrong. Having goaded Satan into the first challenge to His representative agent, God did it again.

> Again there was a day when the sons of God came to present themselves before the LORD, and Satan came also among them to present himself before the LORD. And the LORD said unto Satan, From whence comest thou? And Satan answered the LORD, and said, From going to and fro in the earth, and from walking up and down in it. And the LORD said unto Satan, Hast thou considered my servant Job, that there is none like him in the earth, a perfect and an upright man, one that feareth God, and escheweth evil? and still he holdeth fast his integrity, although thou movedst me against him, to destroy him without cause (Job 2:1–3).

God here admits that Satan had moved God to move against Job. God did not blame Satan as an independent agent, for God had authorized Satan to destroy Job's environment. God admitted that He had ruined Job without cause. Job had not violated God's law.

Satan took the bait. "And Satan answered the LORD, and said, Skin for skin, yea, all that a man hath will he give for his life. But put forth thine hand now, and touch his bone and his flesh, and he will curse thee to thy face" (Job 2:4–5). That was what God had been waiting for. "And the LORD said unto Satan, Behold, he is in thine hand; but save his life" (v. 6).

> So went Satan forth from the presence of the LORD, and smote Job with sore boils from the sole of his foot unto his crown. And he took him a potsherd to scrape himself withal; and he sat down among the ashes. Then

1. Immanual Kant, "The Lawgiver," *Lectures on Ethics* (New York: Harper, [1780?] 1963), p. 52. Cf. "Reward and Punishment," p. 57.

> said his wife unto him, Dost thou still retain thine integrity? curse God, and die. But he said unto her, Thou speakest as one of the foolish women speaketh. What? shall we receive good at the hand of God, and shall we not receive evil? In all this did not Job sin with his lips (Job 2:7–10).

Job's wife did not pass the test. Job did.

Satan then disappears from the story. He is replaced by Job's three comforters. "Now when Job's three friends heard of all this evil that was come upon him, they came every one from his own place; Eliphaz the Temanite, and Bildad the Shuhite, and Zophar the Naamathite: for they had made an appointment together to come to mourn with him and to comfort him" (Job 2:11). The debate over ethics and sanctions fills the remainder of the book.

C. From Effect to Cause

The three comforters rapidly became cross-examiners. Their shift of opinion came in response to Job's questioning of the nature of ethical cause and effect. Job raised a series of questions. They all boiled down to this: "Why me?" He offered a list of reasons why he cursed his birth. But it was not these things, in and of themselves, that called forth his wailing. Rather, it was the underlying system of causation.

> Why is light given to a man whose way is hid, and whom God hath hedged in? For my sighing cometh before I eat, and my roarings are poured out like the waters. For the thing which I greatly feared is come upon me, and that which I was afraid of is come unto me. I was not in safety, neither had I rest, neither was I quiet; yet trouble came (Job 3:23–26).

1. A System of Ethical Causation

Here, he admits that he had relied on a system of ethical causation. He had obeyed God and had offered sacrifices as coverings, yet negative sanctions had come. He is admitting that Satan had been right about his motivation. He does not curse God, but he curses the day he was born. "Let the day perish wherein I was born, and the night in which it was said, There is a man child conceived" (Job 3:3). He does not curse God, but he curses his own history, a history over which God was sovereign. He does not deny the sovereignty of God. He questions its outcome.

His compatriots immediately recognize the underlying theology of his complaint. Job is saying that God is not fair. They rush to defend God's honor. They challenge Job to search his soul. They challenge him to identify the sin that had resulted in the loss of his goods

and his children. Given the magnitude of the negative sanctions, this must have been a very large sin.

Eliphaz leads off.

> Remember, I pray thee, who ever perished, being innocent? or where were the righteous cut off? Even as I have seen, they that plow iniquity, and sow wickedness, reap the same. By the blast of God they perish, and by the breath of his nostrils are they consumed (Job 4:7–9).

He affirms the predictability of God's historical sanctions. Effects have causes. Great effects have great causes. The causes are ethical.

Eliphaz is not content to draw conclusions from the facts. He claims special revelation.

> Now a thing was secretly brought to me, and mine ear received a little thereof. In thoughts from the visions of the night, when deep sleep falleth on men, Fear came upon me, and trembling, which made all my bones to shake. Then a spirit passed before my face; the hair of my flesh stood up: It stood still, but I could not discern the form thereof: an image was before mine eyes, there was silence, and I heard a voice, saying, Shall mortal man be more just than God? shall a man be more pure than his maker? (vv. 12–17)

Who is Job to call God's system of historical sanctions into question? Job's children had all died. This was not random. Effects have causes. Eliphaz says that he has seen all this before.

> I have seen the foolish taking root: but suddenly I cursed his habitation. His children are far from safety, and they are crushed in the gate, neither is there any to deliver them. Whose harvest the hungry eateth up, and taketh it even out of the thorns, and the robber swalloweth up their substance (Job 5:3–5).

Eliphaz knows what he would do if he were in Job's sandals.

> I would seek unto God, and unto God would I commit my cause: Which doeth great things and unsearchable; marvellous things without number: Who giveth rain upon the earth, and sendeth waters upon the fields: To set up on high those that be low; that those which mourn may be exalted to safety. He disappointeth the devices of the crafty, so that their hands cannot perform their enterprise (Job 5:8–12).

God is sovereign. Look to God.

2. Unpredictable Sanctions

Job knows that God is sovereign. This is what baffles him. God is sovereign over history. He brings sanctions. But these sanctions are not always predictable, Job had learned. They are not always re-

sponses to a man's ethical conformity or his sacrifices. He knows he is righteous, yet negative sanctions had come. Job is correct. God had already admitted as much to Satan. "Thou movedst me against him, to destroy him without cause" (Job 2:3).

Job is baffled. This is because he knows nothing of God's challenge to Satan and Satan's challenge to God. But Eliphaz is not baffled in the slightest. He makes a prediction. "Behold, happy is the man whom God correcteth: therefore despise not thou the chastening of the Almighty: For he maketh sore, and bindeth up: he woundeth, and his hands make whole. He shall deliver thee in six troubles: yea, in seven there shall no evil touch thee" (Job 5:17–19). In the final chapter, this prediction came true.

Yet Eliphaz is profoundly wrong. So are his two companions, who extend his argument. We know they were wrong because of what God told them at the end of their verbal exchanges.

> And it was so, that after the LORD had spoken these words unto Job, the LORD said to Eliphaz the Temanite, My wrath is kindled against thee, and against thy two friends: for ye have not spoken of me the thing that is right, as my servant Job hath. Therefore take unto you now seven bullocks and seven rams, and go to my servant Job, and offer up for yourselves a burnt offering; and my servant Job shall pray for you: for him will I accept: lest I deal with you after your folly, in that ye have not spoken of me the thing which is right, like my servant Job (Job 42:7–8).

Eliphaz affirms the covenantal predictability of God in history. Job denies it. Eliphaz predicts that Job will overcome adversity. Job has no faith in this outcome. Then why is Eliphaz wrong? Most of the book of Job is a detailed recitation of the arguments on both sides. The reader must pay close attention to these arguments if he is to sort out the wheat from the chaff.

Conclusion

Job was not at fault for the negative sanctions that came upon him. These sanctions were a test. They were a test of his faith.

The test involved cursing. Satan argued that Job blessed God verbally and ritually because God had blessed Job economically and biologically. If God cursed Job economically and biologically, Job would curse God verbally. This was the heart of Satan's challenge. Satan lost the argument, twice.

Job's sin was to curse the historical cursings in the name of an inherent covenantal unpredictability in history. Eliphaz's sin was to

affirm covenantal predictability in history as a way to challenge Job's prior righteousness. But Job's prior righteousness was unquestionable. It, and it alone, had been the basis of God's challenge to Satan.

Satan moved logically from effect to cause: from Job's external blessings to his covenantal obedience. Eliphaz moved logically from effect to cause: from Job's external cursings to his covenantal disobedience. Both were wrong.

2

FROM WOMB TO TOMB

> *And said, Naked came I out of my mother's womb, and naked shall I return thither: the* Lord *gave, and the* Lord *hath taken away; blessed be the name of the* Lord.
>
> JOB 1:21

The theocentric principle here is God's absolute sovereignty in history.

A. Historical Sanctions

The Book of Job is about historical sanctions. It is also about inheritance in history. We know this because the book ends with the story of Job's second set of 10 children.

> He had also seven sons and three daughters. And he called the name of the first, Jemima; and the name of the second, Kezia; and the name of the third, Keren-happuch. And in all the land were no women found so fair as the daughters of Job: and their father gave them inheritance among their brethren. After this lived Job an hundred and forty years, and saw his sons, and his sons' sons, even four generations. So Job died, being old and full of days (Job 42:13–17).

His inheritance had been cut off by Satan, acting as God's agent. God restored it at the end. The first 10 children remained dead. The second 10 prospered. Even the daughters received an inheritance. The first inheritance was cut off. The second inheritance was not. This was the Bible's consummate story of disinheritance and inheritance until the incarnation: the death, resurrection, and ascension of Jesus Christ.

B. "Why Me?"

Job affirms here that nakedness marks man's entrance into this world, and nakedness marks his exit. "How much did he leave behind?" "All of it!"

In between are blessings and cursings. These come from God. If we praise God as the giver, we should praise Him as the taker. He is no less sovereign as giver or taker.

When men win, they rarely ask, "Why me?" They assume that they deserve this. When men lose, they are tempted to ask, "Why me?" They assume that they do not deserve this. At this stage in the temptation process, Job did not ask, "Why me?" He verbally affirmed the sovereignty of God.

The question, "Why me?" assumes the existence of cause and effect. If there were no system of cause and effect, "Why?" would have no meaning because it would have no answer. The question, "Why me?" implies a search for cause and effect. It also implies a search for another answer: "How can I avoid another round in the future?"

Job affirms that he was as content with blessing as with cursing. This is a statement of great faith. Paul wrote: "In every thing give thanks: for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus concerning you" (I Thes. 5:18). To do this requires faith in both the sovereignty of God and the righteousness of God.

In the third phase of his trials, Job did begin to ask, "Why me?" He sought an answer based on his understanding of covenantal causation. Without such understanding, he recognized, life is meaningless. He did not want to live in a meaningless universe.

C. Corporate Progress

If we enter naked and depart naked, does blessing have any advantage over cursing, other than for hedonism's sake? When pleasure ends at death, what does life matter, one way or the other, to the departed? There has been no relevant economic progress, one way or the other.

If what applies to the individual also applies to society, there is no meaningful corporate progress, one way or the other. This is the outlook of cosmic evolution: from the big bang to the heat death of the frozen universe.[1] Nakedness swallows meaning.

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1. Gary North, *Is the World Running Down? Crisis in the Christian Worldview* (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, 1988), ch. 2.

Job declares his equal acceptance of wealth or poverty, because poverty—nakedness—marks the beginning and the end of each person's life. Yet, if taken literally, blessings are equal to cursings. But God has promised blessings for obedience and cursings for disobedience (Lev. 26; Deut. 28). If they are equal, then are obedience and disobedience equal? Obviously not.

Then what was Job's point? This: *God is sovereign over both blessings and cursings*. Pleasure is better than pain. It is better to be rich and healthy than it is to be poor and sick. In God's system of covenantal causation, we enter into an inheritance when we are born, and we leave an inheritance behind when we die. The inheritance is supposed to be greater at the end than at the beginning. "A good man leaveth an inheritance to his children's children: and the wealth of the sinner is laid up for the just" (Prov. 13:22).[2]

If the accumulation of wealth in one lifetime is the only thing under consideration, then Job's words apply. There is no progress. This was Job's point with respect to praising God. Having nothing or having a great deal makes no difference in the grand scheme of one lifetime. We depart just as we arrived: naked. But this ignores two factors: (1) inheritance beyond the grave, where accumulation is not only possible but ethically mandatory;[3] (2) generational inheritance in history.

From womb to tomb is too short a time perspective. That is because covenantal inheritance is always a factor in history. This inheritance is to be the focus of our efforts in history.

If there is no covenantal economic predictability in history, then economic progress has no ethical relevance. Economic effects are then unrelated to ethical causes. Economic effects that are not connected ethically have no relevance covenantally. They are just random events. Nakedness triumphs.

The same criticism applies to *intergenerational inheritance*. Economic growth then has no economic relevance. Neither does any other area that is marked by the expansion of alternatives: science, technology, education, medicine. Nakedness triumphs.

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2. Gary North, *Wisdom and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Proverbs* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2007] 2012), ch. 41.

3. "Lay not up for yourselves treasures upon earth, where moth and rust doth corrupt, and where thieves break through and steal: But lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust doth corrupt, and where thieves do not break through nor steal" (Matt. 6:19–20). Gary North, *Priorities and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Matthew*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2000] 2012), ch. 13.

The Book of Job rejects this outlook. It reasserts the message of the Book of Deuteronomy: corporate inheritance matters, because it is part of a process of covenantal expansion in history. This process is at bottom ethical-judicial.

Conclusion

Job affirmed the sovereignty of God over history. We are to acknowledge this sovereignty, in good times and bad, in sickness and health, for better or worse, till death's nakedness arrives. But the message of the Book of Job is steadfastly opposed to any view of life that begins with the womb and ends with the tomb.

History displays progress. This progress is covenantal. History displays the sovereignty of God, the authority of man over creation, the Bible-revealed law of God, historical sanctions, and inheritance.

3

POOR ME, POOR SYSTEM

After this opened Job his mouth, and cursed his day.

JOB 3:1

The theocentric principle here is the consistency between ethical cause and outward effect.

A. Job's Lament

Job here begins a lament. He curses his birth. "Let the day perish wherein I was born, and the night in which it was said, There is a man child conceived" (v. 3). He sees the devastation around him. He had been singled out for cursings. One day destroyed everything he had of value. Yet this had not initially produced this response. It had taken a week of silence to produce this outburst (Job 2:13). The more he thought about it, the more he lost confidence in the positive historical sanctions of God. "Why died I not from the womb? why did I not give up the ghost when I came out of the belly?" (v. 11).

Time has become his enemy. He has no confidence that time would produce a reversal of fortune. *He no longer sees time as governed by ethical cause and effect*. Better the rest of death. "For now should I have lain still and been quiet, I should have slept: then had I been at rest, With kings and counsellors of the earth, which built desolate places for themselves" (vv. 13–14). "There the wicked cease from troubling; and there the weary be at rest" (v. 17). He sees the nakedness of death as superior to the negative sanctions of life. Life is a curse. It is no longer an opportunity. Why not? Because there is no predictability of historical sanctions. He had thought there was safety in righteousness. "I was not in safety, neither had I rest, neither was I quiet; yet trouble came" (v. 26).

This is nihilism. This is a self-conscious abandonment of the concept of covenantal inheritance in history.

B. Eliphaz Invokes Predictability

In response, Eliphaz invokes covenantal predictability. "Remember, I pray thee, who ever perished, being innocent? or where were the righteous cut off?" (Job 4:7). He recognizes that Job has abandoned covenant theology at this point. Job has broken from his past.

> Behold, thou hast instructed many, and thou hast strengthened the weak hands. Thy words have upholden him that was falling, and thou hast strengthened the feeble knees. But now it is come upon thee, and thou faintest; it toucheth thee, and thou art troubled. Is not this thy fear, thy confidence, thy hope, and the uprightness of thy ways? (vv. 3–6)

There is nothing new going on, Eliphaz argues. This is the same old cause-and-effect system that Job had invoked when teaching others to overcome the limitations of history. Now, Job has abandoned confidence in that system.

Eliphaz invokes a vision. "Now a thing was secretly brought to me, and mine ear received a little thereof. In thoughts from the visions of the night, when deep sleep falleth on men" (vv. 12–13). A spirit had approached him (v. 15). It asked a rhetorical question. "Shall mortal man be more just than God? shall a man be more pure than his maker?" (v. 17). Eliphaz implies that Job had become such a man. Job is criticizing his environment, which he had previously attributed to God's sovereignty. Who is Job to call God's providence into question?

God's sanctions are still operative. "For wrath killeth the foolish man, and envy slayeth the silly one" (Job 5:2). Nothing has changed.

> I have seen the foolish taking root: but suddenly I cursed his habitation. His children are far from safety, and they are crushed in the gate, neither is there any to deliver them. Whose harvest the hungry eateth up, and taketh it even out of the thorns, and the robber swalloweth up their substance (vv. 3–5).

There will come judgment. "He disappointeth the devices of the crafty, so that their hands cannot perform their enterprise. He taketh the wise in their own craftiness: and the counsel of the froward is carried headlong (vv. 12–13). There is still hope, as there was before. "So the poor hath hope, and iniquity stoppeth her mouth" (v. 16). God will deliver Job (vv. 19–20). But there is a catch. "Behold, happy is the

man whom God correcteth: therefore despise not thou the chastening of the Almighty" (v. 17). He reminds Job that the afflictions were not random. They were part of a chastening process. God is calling Job to mend his ways—his secret ways. Then God's positive sanctions will return.

C. A Man Without Hope

Job launches into a long passage in which he describes his afflictions. His calamity is heavy (Job 6:2). God is against him. "For the arrows of the Almighty are within me, the poison whereof drinketh up my spirit: the terrors of God do set themselves in array against me" (v. 4). He still prefers death (v. 9). There is no hope. "What is my strength, that I should hope? and what is mine end, that I should prolong my life?" (v. 11).

Job's lament presumes that the cause-and-affect system that was announced in Leviticus 26 and Deuteronomy 28 does not apply in his case. Hopelessness is the result. History is no place for a righteous man, he implies. That is what he had learned from events in his life. "What is my strength, that I should hope? and what is mine end, that I should prolong my life?" (v. 11).

Job wants a reward for his righteousness. "As a servant earnestly desireth the shadow, and as an hireling looketh for the reward of his work, So am I made to possess months of vanity, and wearisome nights are appointed to me" (Job 7:2). There is no deliverance. "My days are swifter than a weaver's shuttle, and are spent without hope. O remember that my life is wind: mine eye shall no more see good" (vv. 6–7). Death is preferable (v. 15).

Job cries out to God. Man is so insignificant. Why should God care about man, one way or the other? "What is man, that thou shouldest magnify him? and that thou shouldest set thine heart upon him? And that thou shouldest visit him every morning, and try him every moment?" (vv. 17–18). He recognizes that God is still sovereign. He does not blame an impersonal cosmos or chance. But he sees no reason for his affliction. It is meaningless. Why? Because it does not conform to the system of sanctions in Leviticus 26 and Deuteronomy 28.

D. Bildad Invokes Predictability

Bildad asks a related pair of rhetorical questions. "Doth God pervert judgment? or doth the Almighty pervert justice?" (Job 8:3).

Effects have causes. These judgments are not the product of God's perversity, he insists. As for Job's dead children, "If thy children have sinned against him, and he have cast them away for their transgression" (v. 4). This comforter's first words are vicious, but he thinks he is defending God.

Job's problem, says Bildad, is that he has cut himself off from God, who predictably rewards righteousness.

> If thou wouldest seek unto God betimes, and make thy supplication to the Almighty; If thou wert pure and upright; surely now he would awake for thee, and make the habitation of thy righteousness prosperous. Though thy beginning was small, yet thy latter end should greatly increase. For enquire, I pray thee, of the former age, and prepare thyself to the search of their fathers (vv. 5–8).

If Job has no hope, he should examine his ways. It is the hypocrite who is without hope.

> Whilst it is yet in his greenness, and not cut down, it withereth before any other herb. So are the paths of all that forget God; and the hypocrite's hope shall perish: Whose hope shall be cut off, and whose trust shall be a spider's web (vv. 12–14).

Job has no hope because he is not a perfect man, and never was. "Behold, God will not cast away a perfect man, neither will he help the evil doers" (v. 20).

E. Job's Critique of the System

Job has no illusions that the system is random. God is sovereign.

> He is wise in heart, and mighty in strength: who hath hardened himself against him, and hath prospered? Which removeth the mountains, and they know not: which overturneth them in his anger. Which shaketh the earth out of her place, and the pillars thereof tremble. Which commandeth the sun, and it riseth not; and sealeth up the stars. Which alone spreadeth out the heavens, and treadeth upon the waves of the sea (Job 9:3–8).

Point one of the biblical covenant is two-fold: God as transcendent and God as present.[1] Job has no problem with the first. He has problems with the second. "Lo, he goeth by me, and I see him not: he passeth on also, but I perceive him not" (v. 11). "If I had called, and he had answered me; yet would I not believe that he had hearkened unto

1. Ray R. Sutton, *That You May Prosper: Dominion By Covenant*, 2nd ed. (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, [1987] 1992), ch. 1.

my voice" (v. 16). Why not? Because of the *lack of correlation* between the negative sanctions and his own righteousness. Job announces to his hearers what God had announced to Satan. "For he breaketh me with a tempest, and multiplieth my wounds without cause" (v. 17). The system is morally perverse.

> This is one thing, therefore I said it, He destroyeth the perfect and the wicked. If the scourge slay suddenly, he will laugh at the trial of the innocent. The earth is given into the hand of the wicked: he covereth the faces of the judges thereof; if not, where, and who is he? (vv. 22–24)

This is the heart of the matter, Job insists. *The system is not random. It is perverse*. It is the reverse of what Leviticus 26 and Deuteronomy 28 declare. In operation, Job's world is upside-down ethically. Yet God is in total control. So, there is no hope.

Bildad wants Job to inquire of God. This is not realistic, Job says. "For he is not a man, as I am, that I should answer him, and we should come together in judgment" (v. 32). If only there were a higher court, a higher authority. "Neither is there any daysman betwixt us, that might lay his hand upon us both. Let him take his rod away from me, and let not his fear terrify me: Then would I speak, and not fear him; but it is not so with me" (vv. 33–35).

This self-deprecating announcement does not last for even one more sentence. "My soul is weary of my life; I will leave my complaint upon myself; I will speak in the bitterness of my soul. I will say unto God, Do not condemn me; shew me wherefore thou contendest with me" (Job 10:1–2). He demands that God give an account of Himself and His corrupt system. He asks God a rhetorical question. "Is it good unto thee that thou shouldest oppress, that thou shouldest despise the work of thine hands, and shine upon the counsel of the wicked?" (v. 3).

Job is sure that his actions were not to blame for his afflictions. "Thou knowest that I am not wicked; and there is none that can deliver out of thine hand" (v. 7). Then what is going on here? "Thine hands have made me and fashioned me together round about; yet thou dost destroy me" (v. 8). He then offers a pair of analogies for his condition: poured like milk, curdled like cheese (v. 10). "If I be wicked, woe unto me; and if I be righteous, yet will I not lift up my head. I am full of confusion; therefore see thou mine affliction" (v. 15). But it just keeps getting worse. "Thou renewest thy witnesses against me, and increasest thine indignation upon me; changes and war are

against me" (v. 17). He wants God's neutrality: to be left alone. "Are not my days few? cease then, and let me alone, that I may take comfort a little" (v. 20). Better to be dead (v. 21).

F. Zophar Escalates the Accusation

Job talks too much, Zophar says (Job 11:2). Job is a liar.

"Should thy lies make men hold their peace? and when thou mockest, shall no man make thee ashamed? For thou hast said, My doctrine is pure, and I am clean in thine eyes" (vv. 3–4). If only God would speak and silence Job. "But oh that God would speak, and open his lips against thee" (. v. 5). Not only is Job not innocent, he has been given a light sentence for his iniquity. "And that he would shew thee the secrets of wisdom, that they are double to that which is! Know therefore that God exacteth of thee less than thine iniquity deserveth" (v. 6).

Zophar is in the know. Job isn't. "Canst thou by searching find out God? canst thou find out the Almighty unto perfection? It is as high as heaven; what canst thou do? deeper than hell; what canst thou know? The measure thereof is longer than the earth, and broader than the sea" (vv. 7–9). Job is to blame for his troubles. It is time for a change. "If iniquity be in thine hand, put it far away, and let not wickedness dwell in thy tabernacles" (v. 14). If Job would just follow Zophar's advice, and the advice of his colleagues, things would improve. "And thou shalt be secure, because there is hope; yea, thou shalt dig about thee, and thou shalt take thy rest in safety" (v. 18).

G. Job Is Not Impressed

Job has had enough. It is time for sarcasm. "No doubt but ye are the people, and wisdom shall die with you. But I have understanding as well as you; I am not inferior to you: yea, who knoweth not such things as these?" (Job 12:2–3). He understands the truth, he says.

1. A Perverse System of Causality

The system of causation is perverse. "The tabernacles of robbers prosper, and they that provoke God are secure; into whose hand God bringeth abundantly" (v. 6). Everyone knows this. The beasts of the field know this (v. 7) The fishes know this (v. 8). "Who knoweth not in all these that the hand of the LORD hath wrought this?" (v. 9). He is sovereign. "In whose hand is the soul of every living thing, and the breath of all mankind" (v. 10).

> With him is wisdom and strength, he hath counsel and understanding. Behold, he breaketh down, and it cannot be built again: he shutteth up a man, and there can be no opening. Behold, he withholdeth the waters, and they dry up: also he sendeth them out, and they overturn the earth (vv. 13–15).

Job then offers a list of events in which God is sovereign (vv. 17–23). "He taketh away the heart of the chief of the people of the earth, and causeth them to wander in a wilderness where there is no way. They grope in the dark without light, and he maketh them to stagger like a drunken man" (vv. 24–25). He is describing himself.

He now gains enough confidence to speak with God. "Surely I would speak to the Almighty, and I desire to reason with God" (Job 13:3). In contrast, his accusers are liars. "But ye are forgers of lies, ye are all physicians of no value" (v. 4). They say that they speak on behalf of God, but they do not know what they are talking about. "Will ye speak wickedly for God? and talk deceitfully for him? Will ye accept his person? will ye contend for God?" (vv. 7–8). They should fear God (vv. 9–11).

2. A Declaration of Trust

Job insists that he trusts in God, no matter what. "Though he slay me, yet will I trust in him: but I will maintain mine own ways before him" (v. 15). He declares confidently, "Behold now, I have ordered my cause; I know that I shall be justified" (v. 18). He implores God to cease persecuting him. Then the two of them can talk.

> Withdraw thine hand far from me: and let not thy dread make me afraid. Then call thou, and I will answer: or let me speak, and answer thou me. How many are mine iniquities and sins? make me to know my transgression and my sin. Wherefore hidest thou thy face, and holdest me for thine enemy? (vv. 21–24)

Once again, he criticizes the system of causation. Something is deeply wrong. He has done nothing wrong, yet he is under God's negative sanctions. "Thou puttest my feet also in the stocks, and lookest narrowly unto all my paths; thou settest a print upon the heels of my feet" (v. 27). Job insists that he deserves an explanation. This becomes Job's theme until the final chapter.

Man's time is determined by God. "Seeing his days are determined, the number of his months are with thee, thou hast appointed his bounds that he cannot pass" (Job 14:5). The system of sanctions should be withdrawn from mankind, Job says. Death should consti-

tute the only negative sanction. Anything more than this is too difficult to bear. A man under negative sanctions cannot accomplish his work. "Turn from him, that he may rest, till he shall accomplish, as an hireling, his day" (v. 6). The grave will swallow all men. "So man lieth down, and riseth not: till the heavens be no more, they shall not awake, nor be raised out of their sleep" (v. 12). He has no hope in the resurrection. "If a man die, shall he live again? all the days of my appointed time will I wait, till my change come" (v. 14). What change? Death. "Thou shalt call, and I will answer thee: thou wilt have a desire to the work of thine hands" (v. 15). Man has no hope. God washes away mankind's works. "The waters wear the stones: thou washest away the things which grow out of the dust of the earth; and thou destroyest the hope of man. Thou prevailest for ever against him, and he passeth: thou changest his countenance, and sendest him away" (vv. 19–20).

For Job, history offers no hope. Neither does the grave. A dead man sees no inheritance. "His sons come to honour, and he knoweth it not; and they are brought low, but he perceiveth it not of them" (v. 21). Life offers no hope. "But his flesh upon him shall have pain, and his soul within him shall mourn" (v. 22). Everything is hopeless. Therefore, he prays to God to give him rest and death.

H. Eliphaz Defends Predictable Negative Sanctions

Eliphaz replies. Job speaks folly. "For thy mouth uttereth thine iniquity, and thou choosest the tongue of the crafty" (Job 15:5). Where is Job wrong? By not understanding that God's negative sanctions come on the wicked. "The wicked man travaileth with pain all his days, and the number of years is hidden to the oppressor. A dreadful sound is in his ears: in prosperity the destroyer shall come upon him" (vv. 20–21). He implies that this had been Job's situation. Job had been prosperous. Then poverty came in one day. Such a man loses faith in the future. "He believeth not that he shall return out of darkness, and he is waited for of the sword" (v. 22). This is Job's situation. Well should Job lose faith. The man who challenges God is asking for trouble. "For he stretcheth out his hand against God, and strengtheneth himself against the Almighty" (v. 25). Is there hope for him? No. "He shall not be rich, neither shall his substance continue, neither shall he prolong the perfection thereof upon the earth" (v. 29).

The problem for Job was that he had come under negative sanctions, yet he had been a faithful man. There is therefore no predictable

relationship between righteousness and positive sanctions. Eliphaz and the other two visitors do not believe Job, because they believe in the predictability of God's historical sanctions. Job had been rich. Then he lost his wealth. This testified against his claim of righteousness. The fact that Job called on God to explain Himself was another sign of Job's rebellion. No explanation is necessary, Eliphaz is saying. The negative sanctions testify against Job.

I. Job Insists on His Innocence

Job dismisses their words. "I have heard many such things: miserable comforters are ye all" (Job 16:2). He has had enough. "Shall vain words have an end? or what emboldeneth thee that thou answerest?" (v. 3). "God hath delivered me to the ungodly, and turned me over into the hands of the wicked" (v. 11).

Job says that God has broken him (v. 12). But he insists that this was through no fault on his part. "Not for any injustice in mine hands: also my prayer is pure" (v. 16). This is not just his opinion, he says. "Also now, behold, my witness is in heaven, and my record is on high" (v. 19). The negative sanctions came, but they were not imposed as a punishment for Job's supposed evil. There was no evil. *This means that historical sanctions are not always predictable in terms of Leviticus 26 and Deuteronomy 28*. They are predictable for most righteous people. "The righteous also shall hold on his way, and he that hath clean hands shall be stronger and stronger" (Job 17:9). But they are not for him. "If I wait, the grave is mine house: I have made my bed in the darkness" (v. 13). He has no hope. "I have sewed sackcloth upon my skin, and defiled my horn in the dust" (v. 15).

J. Bildad Judges Job on God's Behalf

Bildad returns to the theme of the three comforters: Job committed sin, and by defending himself verbally, he is digging himself into a hole. His light will be put out by God. "Yea, the light of the wicked shall be put out, and the spark of his fire shall not shine" (Job. 18:5). Job's self-defense will not stand. "The light shall be dark in his tabernacle, and his candle shall be put out with him. The steps of his strength shall be straitened, and his own counsel shall cast him down. For he is cast into a net by his own feet, and he walketh upon a snare" (vv. 6–8).

Bildad waxes eloquent for verse after verse, warning Job that Job has cast his lot with the doomed. The very creation will move against

him. "The snare is laid for him in the ground, and a trap for him in the way" (v. 10). The list is comparable to the list of negative sanctions in Deuteronomy 28. Job will have no name. "His remembrance shall perish from the earth, and he shall have no name in the street" v. 17). There will be no heirs. "He shall neither have son nor nephew among his people, nor any remaining in his dwellings" (v. 19).

All of this rests on a presupposition, namely, that God's negative historical sanctions are imposed only on those who deserve them.

K. Job Identifies God as the Sanctions-Bringer

Job does not blame fate or chance for his condition. He blames God. "Know now that God hath overthrown me, and hath compassed me with his net" (Job 19:6). Job did nothing wrong. God does not hear his cry. "Behold, I cry out of wrong, but I am not heard: I cry aloud, but there is no judgment" (v. 7). He is speaking of a verbal accusation by God, an explanation. He has no hope. "He hath destroyed me on every side, and I am gone: and mine hope hath he removed like a tree" (v. 10).

He recognizes that his critics are not acting autonomously. They are part of God's system of sanctions. All those who once were his friends are his enemies (vv. 11–19). He then utters a phrase that has come down through the ages: "My bone cleaveth to my skin and to my flesh, and I am escaped with the skin of my teeth" (v. 20). Teeth have no skin.

Yet, in the midst of this lament, Job still refuses to abandon God. "For I know that my redeemer liveth, and that he shall stand at the latter day upon the earth" (v. 25). This is a declaration of *resurrection*: the strongest in the Old Testament. "And though after my skin worms destroy this body, yet in my flesh shall I see God" (v. 26).

Yet his condition is not his fault. It is the critics' fault. "But ye should say, Why persecute we him, seeing the root of the matter is found in me?" (v. 28). *He warns them of the wrath to come*. "Be ye afraid of the sword: for wrath bringeth the punishments of the sword, that ye may know there is a judgment" (v. 29). *There is judgment in history*. It can come at any time, just as it has come upon him.

L. Zophar Affirms Deuteronomy 28

Zophar returns to the theme of the visitors. These sanctions are not random. They are deserved. The bigger men are, the harder they fall.

> That the triumphing of the wicked is short, and the joy of the hypocrite but for a moment? Though his excellency mount up to the heavens, and his head reach unto the clouds; Yet he shall perish for ever like his own dung: they which have seen him shall say, Where is he? He shall fly away as a dream, and shall not be found: yea, he shall be chased away as a vision of the night. The eye also which saw him shall see him no more; neither shall his place any more behold him (Job 20:5–9).

He continues on in this vein, providing a litany of sanctions to come. "He hath swallowed down riches, and he shall vomit them up again: God shall cast them out of his belly" (v. 15). He accuses Job of serious moral infractions.

> That which he laboured for shall he restore, and shall not swallow it down: according to his substance shall the restitution be, and he shall not rejoice therein. Because he hath oppressed and hath forsaken the poor; because he hath violently taken away an house which he builded not (vv. 18–19).

Job's future, should he remain intransigent in his profession of innocence, will be ruinous. "The heaven shall reveal his iniquity; and the earth shall rise up against him" (v. 27). There is no escape. "This is the portion of a wicked man from God, and the heritage appointed unto him by God" (v. 29).

M. Job's Faith in Eventual Predictability

His critics have brought warnings and accusations to him, based on his condition as a man under comprehensive negative sanctions. *But sanctions are not predictable in the short term*, he insists. This is true of positive sanctions, too. The wicked prosper for a time.

> Wherefore do the wicked live, become old, yea, are mighty in power? Their seed is established in their sight with them, and their offspring before their eyes. Their houses are safe from fear, neither is the rod of God upon them. Their bull gendereth, and faileth not; their cow calveth, and casteth not her calf. They send forth their little ones like a flock, and their children dance. They take the timbrel and harp, and rejoice at the sound of the organ. They spend their days in wealth, and in a moment go down to the grave (Job 21:7–13).

These people grow confident as a result of their outward prosperity. "Therefore they say unto God, Depart from us; for we desire not the knowledge of thy ways. What is the Almighty, that we should serve him? and what profit should we have, if we pray unto him?" (vv. 14–15). They view their success as independent from God and His sanctions.

This is a mistake. "How oft is the candle of the wicked put out! and how oft cometh their destruction upon them! God distributeth sorrows in his anger. That which he laboured for shall he restore, and shall not swallow it down: according to his substance shall the restitution be, and he shall not rejoice therein" (vv. 17–18). In any case, no one escapes death (vv. 30–33).

N. Eliphaz Adds More Lies

Eliphaz asks what he thinks are two rhetorical questions. They are anything but rhetorical.

> Can a man be profitable unto God, as he that is wise may be profitable unto himself? Is it any pleasure to the Almighty, that thou art righteous? or is it gain to him that thou makest thy ways perfect? (Job 22:2–3)

This is a profound pair of questions. They reflect what Cornelius Van Til called the *full-bucket paradox*. God's glory is like a full bucket of water. How can adding anything to this full bucket fill it even more? God is infinite, yet the creation is something extra. It is not part of God's being. It is different from His being: subordinate, yet real. Furthermore, God is infinite in His glory, yet we are to glorify Him. How do we add anything to a full bucket? Yet we do. History has meaning. We have meaning.

Eliphaz is trying to prove that Job is nothing compared to God. Eliphaz is incorrect. Man is something compared to God. He is the image of God. It was very important to God that Job was righteous. It was so important that God twice goaded Satan about Job's righteousness. Job's refusal to curse God was the whole point. This proved God's point. The debate between God and Satan from the garden of Eden until the final judgment is about the righteousness of covenant-keepers in relation to covenant-breakers. The outcome of this debate is so important to God that God has imposed a system of covenantal historical sanctions that structures the historical inheritance of both groups. "A good man leaveth an inheritance to his children's children: and the wealth of the sinner is laid up for the just" (Prov. 13:22).[2] By denigrating the importance of a man's ethics in God's outlook, Eliphaz calls this system of sanctions into question, yet he has rested his case against Job on the basis of the predictability of these sanctions.

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2. Gary North, *Wisdom and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Proverbs* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2007] 2012), ch. 41.

Job has denied his sin. This denial has lured Eliphaz and his compatriots into making ever-more preposterous accusations. "Is not thy wickedness great? and thine iniquities infinite? For thou hast taken a pledge from thy brother for nought, and stripped the naked of their clothing" (vv. 5–6). Job has withheld bread to the hungry (v. 7). "Thou hast sent widows away empty, and the arms of the fatherless have been broken" (v. 9). Therefore, Job is under God's sanctions. "Therefore snares are round about thee, and sudden fear troubleth thee; Or darkness, that thou canst not see; and abundance of waters cover thee" (vv. 10–11).

Job has admitted repeatedly that God is the sole source of His afflictions. Eliphaz has not listened. He accuses Job of spiritual blindness. Job refuses to confess his sin, as if God cannot see this sin. "And thou sayest, How doth God know? can he judge through the dark cloud? Thick clouds are a covering to him, that he seeth not; and he walketh in the circuit of heaven" vv. 13–14). Job is blind to the predictability of God's negative sanctions. "Hast thou marked the old way which wicked men have trodden? Which were cut down out of time, whose foundation was overflown with a flood: Which said unto God, Depart from us: and what can the Almighty do for them?" (vv. 15–17). Eliphaz calls Job to repentance. "If thou return to the Almighty, thou shalt be built up, thou shalt put away iniquity far from thy tabernacles" (v. 23). If Job will do this, he will be rich once again. "Then shalt thou lay up gold as dust, and the gold of Ophir as the stones of the brooks" (v. 24). The sanctions are predictable.

O. Job Wants a Judicial Hearing

Job remains confident that he has done nothing wrong. He cries out for a judicial hearing. "Oh that I knew where I might find him! that I might come even to his seat! I would order my cause before him, and fill my mouth with arguments" (Job 23:3–4). Job is confident in his own righteousness. "I would know the words which he would answer me, and understand what he would say unto me. Will he plead against me with his great power? No; but he would put strength in me. There the righteous might dispute with him; so should I be delivered for ever from my judge" (vv. 5–7). The problem is, God will not give him a hearing. "Behold, I go forward, but he is not there; and backward, but I cannot perceive him: On the left hand, where he doth work, but I cannot behold him: he hideth himself on the right hand, that I cannot see him" (vv. 8–9). But if he ever gets his hearing,

God will declare him innocent. "But he knoweth the way that I take: when he hath tried me, I shall come forth as gold" (v. 10). Why? "My foot hath held his steps, his way have I kept, and not declined" (v. 11).

The problem is, *God is sovereign*. He cannot be moved. "But he is in one mind, and who can turn him? and what his soul desireth, even that he doeth" (v. 13). He is in control. "For he performeth the thing that is appointed for me: and many such things are with him" (v. 14). Conclusion: "Therefore am I troubled at his presence: when I consider, I am afraid of him" (v. 15).

Eliphaz has accused Job of being blind to God's ability to see into Job's heart. Job counters by affirming God's omniscience. Covenant-breakers do not perceive this. "Why, seeing times are not hidden from the Almighty, do they that know him not see his days?" (Job 24:1). Some steal by moving landmarks (v. 2), contrary to Deuteronomy 27:17. "Cursed be he that removeth his neighbour's landmark. And all the people shall say, Amen." Others steal animals from orphans. They take the widow's pledge (v. 3), contrary to Deuteronomy 24:17. "Thou shalt not pervert the judgment of the stranger, nor of the fatherless; nor take a widow's raiment to pledge." They sin in many ways (vv. 7–11). But there is a problem: they get away with it. "Men groan from out of the city, and the soul of the wounded crieth out: yet God layeth not folly to them" (v. 12). Eventually, they die. "Drought and heat consume the snow waters: so doth the grave those which have sinned" (v. 19). The sinner is forgotten (v. 20).

The sinner does not know when God's wrath will come upon him. "Though it be given him to be in safety, whereon he resteth; yet his eyes are upon their ways" (v. 23). Their end draweth nigh. "They are exalted for a little while, but are gone and brought low; they are taken out of the way as all other, and cut off as the tops of the ears of corn" (v. 24).

Job does not deny negative sanctions. He only denies that they are readily predictable. Bad things happen to bad people, but bad things also happen to good people. Job is one of these.

P. Bildad Invokes Worms

This is the final response of the three comforters. It is short. He invokes God's dominion. "Then answered Bildad the Shuhite, and said, Dominion and fear are with him, he maketh peace in his high places" (Job 25:1–2). Job has affirmed this point repeatedly. Bildad does not undercut Job's affirmations with this affirmation.

He then asks a rhetorical question. "How then can man be justified with God? or how can he be clean that is born of a woman?" (v. 4). The answer is simple: *redemption*. God has provided a way of redemption, in which God justifies a man. Job has argued that such had been his case prior to the negative sanctions. He had not sinned before God. The sanctions are not consistent with his new condition. To counter this, Bildad invokes finitude rather than ethics. The heavenly spheres are nothing, compared to God. "Behold even to the moon, and it shineth not; yea, the stars are not pure in his sight" (v. 5). Then comes what he regards as the coup de grace. "How much less man, that is a worm? and the son of man, which is a worm?" (v. 6).

This misses the point. Worms are not ethically responsible to God. Men are. God's system of historical sanctions applies to earth's creatures only insofar as they are under men's jurisdiction. As covenantal subordinates to man's dominion, they suffer. Paul later wrote:

> For the earnest expectation of the creature waiteth for the manifestation of the sons of God. For the creature was made subject to vanity, not willingly, but by reason of him who hath subjected the same in hope, Because the creature itself also shall be delivered from the bondage of corruption into the glorious liberty of the children of God. For we know that the whole creation groaneth and travaileth in pain together until now. And not only they, but ourselves also, which have the firstfruits of the Spirit, even we ourselves groan within ourselves, waiting for the adoption, to wit, the redemption of our body (Rom. 8:19–23).[3]

Man is a creature. In this sense, he shares the condition of a worm. He is not God. But he is made in God's image. He is far more than a worm. Bildad's response is irrelevant to the issue of Job's condition.

Conclusion

Job began his defense with a curse on his condition. It would have been better if he had not been born. He did not criticize God directly. He criticized Him indirectly. He criticized the results of God's providence. Here is his argument. God is in charge. He is therefore responsible. Job's condition was inconsistent with the system of sanctions God had announced to Moses. That system is not rigorously predictable. It does not provide a sure pathway to everyone's success.

On hearing this lament, his three comforters immediately became critics. They affirmed that the system of sanctions is predictable. The

3. Gary North, *Cooperation and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Romans*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2000] 2012), ch. 6.

fault is not in the system, they insisted. It is in Job's behavior. Causes have predictable effects. Negative sanctions point back clearly to some sin in Job's life that warrants his condition. Because his condition is disastrous, the hidden sin must be substantial.

Job denied their argument by denying the universality of God's system of ethical cause and effect. It is not legitimate to draw conclusions about causes from the visible effects—not in his case, anyway. The three critics regarded this argument as additional evidence of Job's lack of accurate self-judgment. God's judgment is always warranted, they argue. Trust it.

This is an argument about predictability in history. How can there be an increase in ethical self-discipline if external effects are not consistent with ethical causes? How can men learn what pleases God and what angers Him if His system of sanctions does not provide motivation for covenant-keeping? Job was calling into question God's covenant governing each individual. The system produces perverse results. Nice guys finish last—not always, but often enough to call into question the covenant. The critics recognized this line of reasoning, and they challenged his conclusion.

The reason why these exchanges are difficult to understand is that *both sides appealed to what the Bible teaches*. First, there is a system of sanctions. Second, we know what Job did not know, namely, that God ignored this system of sanctions because of Satan's response to God's challenge to Satan. The violation of the sanctions was necessary for God to prove to Satan that Job was not righteous for the sake of the positive sanctions. He was righteous for the sake of God. Satan was silenced by Job's initial responses: acceptance.

This was not true of the visitors. They were not silent. There was a reason for this. In response to the initial challenges from Satan, Job did not demand an explanation from God. He held his peace. But, after thinking for a week in silence about what had happened, he reversed course. He did not curse God. Instead, he cursed God's providential gift of life to Job. The gift was not a gift, Job said. It was a curse. The three visitors answered by laying blame at Job's doorstep. Do not blame God, they said; blame yourself.

Job then justified himself in a long soliloquy: Job 26 through 31.

4

JOB ON JUSTICE AND SANCTIONS

Hell is naked before him, and destruction hath no covering. He stretcheth out the north over the empty place, and hangeth the earth upon nothing.

JOB 26:6–7

A. The Sovereignty of God

Thus begins Job's lengthy affirmation of the sovereignty of God. He is no less committed to this doctrine than his three critics are. He affirms God's mastery over creation. "He bindeth up the waters in his thick clouds; and the cloud is not rent under them. He holdeth back the face of his throne, and spreadeth his cloud upon it. He hath compassed the waters with bounds, until the day and night come to an end" (vv. 8–10). The debate between Job and his critics is not over point one of the biblical covenant: sovereignty. It is a debate over point four: sanctions.

He declares his commitment to predictable negative sanctions. "This is the portion of a wicked man with God, and the heritage of oppressors, which they shall receive of the Almighty. If his children be multiplied, it is for the sword: and his offspring shall not be satisfied with bread" (vv. 13–14). God had warned Israel through Moses, "Thou shalt beget sons and daughters, but thou shalt not enjoy them; for they shall go into captivity" (Deut. 28:41). God had also warned Israel, "Thou shalt betroth a wife, and another man shall lie with her: thou shalt build an house, and thou shalt not dwell therein: thou shalt plant a vineyard, and shalt not gather the grapes thereof" (Deut. 28:30). Rebellious men's inheritance will be cut off. God was speaking of conquerors inheriting. Job affirms something similar. "Though

he heap up silver as the dust, and prepare raiment as the clay; He may prepare it, but the just shall put it on, and the innocent shall divide the silver" (vv. 16–17). This corresponds to Solomon's dictum, "A good man leaveth an inheritance to his children's children: and the wealth of the sinner is laid up for the just" (Prov. 13:22).[1] The rich man will lose his wealth in a night. Job declares:

> The rich man shall lie down, but he shall not be gathered: he openeth his eyes, and he is not. Terrors take hold on him as waters, a tempest stealeth him away in the night. The east wind carrieth him away, and he departeth: and as a storm hurleth him out of his place. For God shall cast upon him, and not spare: he would fain flee out of his hand. Men shall clap their hands at him, and shall hiss him out of his place (vv. 19–23).

His critics have defended God's predictable negative sanctions. He in no way disagrees. They have concluded that he is under negative sanctions because of a hidden sin. He denies this. He is correct in his self-defense, as Job 1–2 reveals. He is the victim of a debate between supernatural beings. He does not know this, but he knows the outcome: negative sanctions without an ethical cause. He is innocent.

Job then moves to the identification of God as all-powerful and all-knowing. "He putteth forth his hand upon the rock; he overturneth the mountains by the roots. He cutteth out rivers among the rocks; and his eye seeth every precious thing" (Job 28:9–10).

Men seek wisdom. Where is it found? (v. 12). Men do not know the price of wisdom (v. 13). Gold will not buy it (v. 15). "It cannot be valued with the gold of Ophir, with the precious onyx, or the sapphire. The gold and the crystal cannot equal it: and the exchange of it shall not be for jewels of fine gold" (vv. 16–17). This reaffirms what Solomon taught. "Happy is the man that findeth wisdom, and the man that getteth understanding. For the merchandise of it is better than the merchandise of silver, and the gain thereof than fine gold. She is more precious than rubies: and all the things thou canst desire are not to be compared unto her" (Prov. 3:13–15). Job is affirming his commitment to the covenant's scale of economic values. From whence comes wisdom (v. 20)? From God. "God understandeth the way thereof, and he knoweth the place thereof" (v. 23). Job affirms God as the source of original assessment: point four of the biblical covenant.

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1. Gary North, *Wisdom and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Proverbs* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2007] 2012), ch. 41.

> For he looketh to the ends of the earth, and seeth under the whole heaven; To make the weight for the winds; and he weigheth the waters by measure. When he made a decree for the rain, and a way for the lightning of the thunder: Then did he see it, and declare it; he prepared it, yea, and searched it out (vv. 24–27).

Having confessed his commitment to points one and four of the biblical covenant, Job then declares his innocence.

B. A Declaration of Innocence

1. Positive Sanctions

God had been with him, he declares. "Oh that I were as in months past, as in the days when God preserved me; When his candle shined upon my head, and when by his light I walked through darkness" (Job 29:2–3). He had been the recipient of God's positive sanctions. God had been with him; so had his children (v. 5). He had been honored by the community (vv. 8–11). Why? "Because I delivered the poor that cried, and the fatherless, and him that had none to help him. The blessing of him that was ready to perish came upon me: and I caused the widow's heart to sing for joy" (vv. 12–13). He had been generous, not an oppressor, contrary to what his critics had claimed. "Because I delivered the poor that cried, and the fatherless, and him that had none to help him. The blessing of him that was ready to perish came upon me: and I caused the widow's heart to sing for joy. I put on righteousness, and it clothed me: my judgment was as a robe and a diadem" (vv. 12–14). In short, he had been a source of positive sanctions. This gave him confidence in the future. "Then I said, I shall die in my nest, and I shall multiply my days as the sand" (v. 18). There was covenantal correlation: point three (ethics), point four (judgment), and point five (the future).

2. The Great Reversal

Then came the great reversal. "But now they that are younger than I have me in derision, whose fathers I would have disdained to have set with the dogs of my flock" (Job 30:1). They had been his social inferiors. Now they deride him. They had been paupers and refugees (vv. 3–7). "They were children of fools, yea, children of base men: they were viler than the earth. And now am I their song, yea, I am their byword (vv. 8–9). They now do what they can to make his life miserable (vv. 10–14).

Job does not say that his three critics are ethically base men. He

merely describes what ethically base men have done to him. He lets them draw the logical conclusion. They are allied with ethically base men.

How did this happen? God did it.

> He hath cast me into the mire, and I am become like dust and ashes. I cry unto thee, and thou dost not hear me: I stand up, and thou regardest me not. Thou art become cruel to me: with thy strong hand thou opposest thyself against me. Thou liftest me up to the wind; thou causest me to ride upon it, and dissolvest my substance (vv. 19–22).

All this was true. Job is not inventing stories. God, by unleashing Satan, brought Job low. But why? Job had empathised for the poor, as God requires. "Did not I weep for him that was in trouble? was not my soul grieved for the poor? (v. 25). Yet reversal has come. "When I looked for good, then evil came unto me: and when I waited for light, there came darkness" (v. 26).

3. Inheritance

He raises the issue of inheritance. "For what portion of God is there from above? and what inheritance of the Almighty from on high? Is not destruction to the wicked? and a strange punishment to the workers of iniquity?" (Job 31:2–3). This does not threaten him. "Doth not he see my ways, and count all my steps?" (v. 4). He wants God's formal judgment.

> Let me be weighed in an even balance, that God may know mine integrity. If my step hath turned out of the way, and mine heart walked after mine eyes, and if any blot hath cleaved to mine hands; Then let me sow, and let another eat; yea, let my offspring be rooted out (vv. 6–8).

4. Charity

Job does not defend himself merely in terms of his not having actively done evil. He defends himself in his not neglecting to do good: showing charity.

> If I have withheld the poor from their desire, or have caused the eyes of the widow to fail; Or have eaten my morsel myself alone, and the fatherless hath not eaten thereof; (For from my youth he was brought up with me, as with a father, and I have guided her from my mother's womb;) If I have seen any perish for want of clothing, or any poor without covering; If his loins have not blessed me, and if he were not warmed with the fleece of my sheep; If I have lifted up my hand against the fatherless, when I saw my

> help in the gate: Then let mine arm fall from my shoulder blade, and mine arm be broken from the bone (vv. 16–22).

He had always been afraid of God. "For destruction from God was a terror to me, and by reason of his highness I could not endure" (v. 23).

5. Trust in God

He insists that he has not trusted his wealth. "If I have made gold my hope, or have said to the fine gold, Thou art my confidence; If I rejoiced because my wealth was great, and because mine hand had gotten much" (vv. 24–25). The positive sanctions have not been the heart of his religion. In this, he denies Satan's original accusation. "Hast not thou made an hedge about him, and about his house, and about all that he hath on every side? thou hast blessed the work of his hands, and his substance is increased in the land. But put forth thine hand now, and touch all that he hath, and he will curse thee to thy face" (Job 1:10–11).

He challenges God to bring a charge against him.

> Oh that one would hear me! behold, my desire is, that the Almighty would answer me, and that mine adversary had written a book. Surely I would take it upon my shoulder, and bind it as a crown to me. I would declare unto him the number of my steps; as a prince would I go near unto him (vv. 35–37).

Conclusion

Job did not deny that God brings negative historical against covenant-breakers. He affirmed this. What he denied was that the negative sanctions that God had brought against him were justified in terms of God's law. He had not committed sin. He also had done positive good. He had been rich. He never trusted his riches. He always feared God.

He ended his defense with a call for negative sanctions in response to any evil he had done. "Let thistles grow instead of wheat, and cockle instead of barley. The words of Job are ended" (v. 40).

5

ELIHU ON GOD'S SOVEREIGNTY

So these three men ceased to answer Job, because he was righteous in his own eyes. Then was kindled the wrath of Elihu the son of Barachel the Buzite, of the kindred of Ram: against Job was his wrath kindled, because he justified himself rather than God. Also against his three friends was his wrath kindled, because they had found no answer, and yet had condemned Job.

JOB 32:1–3

We are three-quarters of the way through the Book of Job. This is the first mention of Elihu, whose name means "his God." He had restrained himself, for he was young. "Now Elihu had waited till Job had spoken, because they were elder than he. When Elihu saw that there was no answer in the mouth of these three men, then his wrath was kindled" (vv. 4–5).

A. Elihu's Challenge

He lays down a challenge. "Great men are not always wise: neither do the aged understand judgment" (v. 9). They are older; he is younger; nevertheless, they should still listen to him.

He says that the three had not answered Job (v. 12). Obviously, they had answered him verbally. But they had not answered him theologically. Why had Elihu said nothing? Because Job's words had not been directed at him. "Now he hath not directed his words against me: neither will I answer him with your speeches" (v. 14). He recognizes that they had responded to Job without coming to grips with Job's reasoning.

He does not attempt to win over his opponents by softening his preliminary words. "For I know not to give flattering titles; in so doing my maker would soon take me away" (v. 22).

Having identified himself as the opponent of Job's critics, he then turns to Job. "Wherefore, Job, I pray thee, hear my speeches, and hearken to all my words" (Job 33:1). He insists that he speaks on behalf of God. "Behold, I am according to thy wish in God's stead: I also am formed out of the clay" (v. 6). He summarizes Job's argument to his critics.

> Surely thou hast spoken in mine hearing, and I have heard the voice of thy words, saying, I am clean without transgression, I am innocent; neither is there iniquity in me. Behold, he findeth occasions against me, he counteth me for his enemy, He putteth my feet in the stocks, he marketh all my paths (vv. 8–11).

This is a good summary of Job's self-defense. Job did not commit an offense, yet God imposed negative sanctions on him. Elihu's response: "Behold, in this thou art not just: I will answer thee, that God is greater than man" (v. 12). Job has repeatedly called on God to explain Himself. "Why dost thou strive against him? for he giveth not account of any of his matters" (v. 13). He identifies the theology of God's declaration: *I am God; you are not*. This declaration is supreme in history.

Furthermore, God is not silent. "For God speaketh once, yea twice, yet man perceiveth it not. In a dream, in a vision of the night, when deep sleep falleth upon men, in slumberings upon the bed; Then he openeth the ears of men, and sealeth their instruction" (vv. 14–16). God's goal is to keep every man from following his autonomous purpose. "That he may withdraw man from his purpose, and hide pride from man" (v. 17). Why? Because man is self-destructive. "He keepeth back his soul from the pit, and his life from perishing by the sword" (v. 18). But men do not listen to God apart from negative sanctions.

> He is chastened also with pain upon his bed, and the multitude of his bones with strong pain: So that his life abhorreth bread, and his soul dainty meat. His flesh is consumed away, that it cannot be seen; and his bones that were not seen stick out. Yea, his soul draweth near unto the grave, and his life to the destroyers (vv. 19–22).

This had also been Eliphaz's initial response to Job. "Behold, happy is the man whom God correcteth: therefore despise not thou the chastening of the Almighty: For he maketh sore, and bindeth up: he woundeth, and his hands make whole" (Job 5:17–18).

Elihu affirms that God will respond to anyone who repents.

> He shall pray unto God, and he will be favourable unto him: and he shall see his face with joy: for he will render unto man his righteousness. He looketh upon men, and if any say, I have sinned, and perverted that which

> was right, and it profited me not; He will deliver his soul from going into the pit, and his life shall see the light (vv. 26–28).

This had also been the message of Eliphaz in his first response to Job. "Thou shalt be hid from the scourge of the tongue: neither shalt thou be afraid of destruction when it cometh. At destruction and famine thou shalt laugh: neither shalt thou be afraid of the beasts of the earth" (Job 5:21–22). Eliphaz repeated this message in his final response to Job. "If thou return to the Almighty, thou shalt be built up, thou shalt put away iniquity far from thy tabernacles. Then shalt thou lay up gold as dust, and the gold of Ophir as the stones of the brooks. Yea, the Almighty shall be thy defence, and thou shalt have plenty of silver" (Job. 22:23–25). So far, Elihu has said nothing new.

He repeats Job's argument. "For Job hath said, I am righteous: and God hath taken away my judgment" (Job 34:5). Job has rejected the relevance of sanctions. "For he hath said, It profiteth a man nothing that he should delight himself with God" (Job 34:9). This was indeed the implication of Job's self-defense. This means that *God is not a reliable judge*. His law promises positive sanctions for obedience (Deut. 28:1–14). Elihu responds: "Therefore hearken unto me, ye men of understanding: far be it from God, that he should do wickedness; and from the Almighty, that he should commit iniquity" (v. 10). "Yea, surely God will not do wickedly, neither will the Almighty pervert judgment" (v. 12).

B. Has God Made a Mistake? Is He Unfair?

Elihu reminds Job of the sovereignty of God and the non-sovereignty of men in general and Job in particular.

> Who hath given him a charge over the earth? or who hath disposed the whole world? If he set his heart upon man, if he gather unto himself his spirit and his breath; All flesh shall perish together, and man shall turn again unto dust. If now thou hast understanding, hear this: hearken to the voice of my words. Shall even he that hateth right govern? and wilt thou condemn him that is most just? Is it fit to say to a king, Thou art wicked? and to princes, Ye are ungodly? How much less to him that accepteth not the persons of princes, nor regardeth the rich more than the poor? for they all are the work of his hands (vv. 13–19).

Job has called God's judgment into question. He has said that he is under negative sanctions, yet he did nothing to deserve these sanctions. The reader knows that this is true. In fact, it was Job's righ-

teousness that was the original source of the confrontation between God and Satan. If Job had not been perfect, God would not have initiated this confrontation.

Elihu does not know about this. He would not change his line of reasoning if he did. *Job is not in a position as a creature to call God's decisions into question*. "For he will not lay upon man more than right; that he should enter into judgment with God" (v. 23). God has not explained Himself to Job. So what? "When he giveth quietness, who then can make trouble? and when he hideth his face, who then can behold him? whether it be done against a nation, or against a man only" (Job 34:29).

He offers advice to Job. It is all right to ask why God has brought sanctions, but only so that he does not pursue evil. "Surely it is meet [fit] to be said unto God, I have borne chastisement, I will not offend any more: That which I see not teach thou me: if I have done iniquity, I will do no more" (vv. 31–32). Why is this legitimate? Because a man should not follow his own judgment autonomously. "Should it be according to thy mind? he will recompense it, whether thou refuse, or whether thou choose; and not I: therefore speak what thou knowest" (v. 33). But Job had not asked for correction. He had insisted that he was not in need of correction. Fine. Then the correct response would have been to sit there and shut up. "Job hath spoken without knowledge, and his words were without wisdom" (Job 34:35).

Job has transgressed. "My desire is that Job may be tried unto the end because of his answers for wicked men. For he addeth rebellion unto his sin, he clappeth his hands among us, and multiplieth his words against God" (vv. 36–37). Job had answered the three critics, all wicked men. He should have just sat there and remained silent, just as he had done initially.

C. Does God Owe Job an Explanation?

Job had insisted that God answer him. Who is Job to demand this? Does God owe Job anything? "Thinkest thou this to be right, that thou saidst, My righteousness is more than God's?" (Job 35:2). God has the right to sit there and shut up. Job should do the same. As for the absence of positive sanctions, "For thou saidst, What advantage will it be unto thee? and, What profit shall I have, if I be cleansed from my sin? I will answer thee, and thy companions with thee" (vv. 3–4). He asks a rhetorical question. "If thou be righteous, what givest thou him? or what receiveth he of thine hand? (v. 7).

Elihu then notes a familiar pattern of behavior. Men cry out when

things go wrong, but they do not praise God when things go right. "By reason of the multitude of oppressions they make the oppressed to cry: they cry out by reason of the arm of the mighty. But none saith, Where is God my maker, who giveth songs in the night; Who teacheth us more than the beasts of the earth, and maketh us wiser than the fowls of heaven?" (vv. 9–11). So, God does not reply when they call out for deliverance in bad times. "There they cry, but none giveth answer, because of the pride of evil men. Surely God will not hear vanity, neither will the Almighty regard it" (vv. 12–13).

Job is impatient. *God has His own timetable*. God brings sanctions in His own good time.

> Although thou sayest thou shalt not see him, yet judgment is before him; therefore trust thou in him. But now, because it is not so, he hath visited in his anger; yet he knoweth it not in great extremity: Therefore doth Job open his mouth in vain; he multiplieth words without knowledge (vv. 14–16).

D. On Behalf of God

Elihu says that he speaks on God's behalf. "Suffer me a little, and I will shew thee that I have yet to speak on God's behalf. I will fetch my knowledge from afar, and will ascribe righteousness to my Maker" (Job 36:2–3). He asserts that he is correct. "For truly my words shall not be false: he that is perfect in knowledge is with thee" (v. 4).

God does bring judgment in history, he insists.

> Behold, God is mighty, and despiseth not any: he is mighty in strength and wisdom. He preserveth not the life of the wicked: but giveth right to the poor. He withdraweth not his eyes from the righteous: but with kings are they on the throne; yea, he doth establish them for ever, and they are exalted. And if they be bound in fetters, and be holden in cords of affliction" (vv. 5–8).

God warns rulers. If they turn from evil, they are rewarded. If not, they come under negative sanctions.

> Then he sheweth them their work, and their transgressions that they have exceeded. He openeth also their ear to discipline, and commandeth that they return from iniquity. If they obey and serve him, they shall spend their days in prosperity, and their years in pleasures. But if they obey not, they shall perish by the sword, and they shall die without knowledge (vv. 9–12).

So far, Elihu has said nothing about God's historical sanctions that Job has not said and his critics have not said.[1]

1. Job (Job 27:13–23); Eliphaz (Job 7–9; 5:16–20; 15:20–35); Bildad (Job 18:5–19; 36:1–20); Zophar (Job 20:5–29).

Elihu asks a rhetorical question. "Will he esteem thy riches? no, not gold, nor all the forces of strength" (v. 19). But Job has already affirmed this: "For destruction from God was a terror to me, and by reason of his highness I could not endure. If I have made gold my hope, or have said to the fine gold, Thou art my confidence; If I rejoiced because my wealth was great, and because mine hand had gotten much" (Job 31:23–25). Elihu warns: "Desire not the night, when people are cut off in their place" (v. 20). But Job had gone on at considerable length in describing the night as the preferred time for evil-doers.[2] Elihu is telling Job nothing new.

Elihu describes God as the source of changes in nature (Job 36:27–37:13). He then says, "Hearken unto this, O Job: stand still, and consider the wondrous works of God" (v. 37). But Job already knows this. "Behold, he withholdeth the waters, and they dry up: also he sendeth them out, and they overturn the earth" (Job 12:15). He has described God as sovereign over nature (Job 26). Elihu has yet to add anything to Job's knowledge.

Elihu asks Job rhetorically, "Dost thou know the balancings of the clouds, the wondrous works of him which is perfect in knowledge?" (v. 16). He continues in this vein until his speech ends (vv. 17–22). He ends with this: "Touching the Almighty, we cannot find him out: he is excellent in power, and in judgment, and in plenty of justice: he will not afflict. Men do therefore fear him: he respecteth not any that are wise of heart" (vv. 23–24).

Conclusion

Elihu began by criticizing the three critics, but then spent his time attacking Job. He used numerous arguments against Job that Job had already affirmed. Elihu affirmed the reliability of God's sanctions. Job did, too, but added that this was not true in his case. Elihu wanted Job not to call into question God's reliability. Elihu also called on Job to refrain from insisting that God should answer him. God owes no one an explanation, Elihu said. Elihu affirmed God's control over nature. Job did, too.

2. "Men groan from out of the city, and the soul of the wounded crieth out: yet God layeth not folly to them. They are of those that rebel against the light; they know not the ways thereof, nor abide in the paths thereof. The murderer rising with the light killeth the poor and needy, and in the night is as a thief. The eye also of the adulterer waiteth for the twilight, saying, No eye shall see me: and disguiseth his face. In the dark they dig through houses, which they had marked for themselves in the daytime: they know not the light. For the morning is to them even as the shadow of death: if one know them, they are in the terrors of the shadow of death" (Job 24:12–17).

There was not much new in Elihu's speech. He insisted that he represented God, but the only new ideas that he added to the discussion were these: (1) Job should not cast aspersions on God's judgment; (3) Job's time frame is too short; (3) God owes Job no answer.

6

GOD ASKS RHETORICAL QUESTIONS

> *Then the* Lord *answered Job out of the whirlwind, and said, Who is this that darkeneth counsel by words without knowledge? Gird up now thy loins like a man; for I will demand of thee, and answer thou me.*
>
> JOB 38:1–3

Here begins the longest passage in the Bible that is attributed to God. God elsewhere speaks directly to men on occasion, but never with this degree of detail.

A. I'm God, and You're Not

His speech is a long series of rhetorical questions. They all have the same theme: *God's sovereignty over the operations of nature*. The section is one long announcement of "I'm God; you're not." This section is addressed to no one in particular.

> Where wast thou when I laid the foundations of the earth? declare, if thou hast understanding (v. 4).

Here, He announces His creation of the earth. He begins with the earth, not the heavens.

He is sovereign over the seas (vv. 8, 11). He rules night and day (vv. 12–13). He controls death (v. 17). He controls the rain (v. 28). He controls the seasons (v. 29). He controls the pathways of the stars (v. 31). He controls the animal world (Job 39).

> Doth the hawk fly by thy wisdom, and stretch her wings toward the south? Doth the eagle mount up at thy command, and make her nest on high? (vv. 26–27)

B. Job Gets His Interview

Chapter 40 begins with these words:

> Moreover the LORD answered Job, and said, Shall he that contendeth with the Almighty instruct him? he that reproveth God, let him answer it (vv. 1–2).

Job immediately recognizes his sin. It was the sin that Elihu had identified: *challenging God's judgment*.

> Behold, I am vile; what shall I answer thee? I will lay mine hand upon my mouth. Once have I spoken; but I will not answer: yea, twice; but I will proceed no further (vv. 4–5).

Job had demanded that God explain Himself. God now explains Himself. "Gird up thy loins now like a man: I will demand of thee, and declare thou unto me" (v. 7). Elihu had asked rhetorically: "Thinkest thou this to be right, that thou saidst, My righteousness is more than God's?" (Job 35:2). God extends Elihu's insight. "Wilt thou also disannul my judgment? wilt thou condemn me, that thou mayest be righteous?" (v. 8). If so, do the following.

> Deck thyself now with majesty and excellency; and array thyself with glory and beauty. Cast abroad the rage of thy wrath: and behold every one that is proud, and abase him. Look on every one that is proud, and bring him low; and tread down the wicked in their place. Hide them in the dust together; and bind their faces in secret. Then will I also confess unto thee that thine own right hand can save thee (vv. 10–14).

This has to do with ethical judgment, not control over nature. God began with His absolute sovereignty over nature. He now gets to the point: *His power to evaluate right and wrong and then impose justice*. Is Job ready to do this? If he is, then he can save himself.

C. Job Sees the Light

This was sufficient for Job.

> Then Job answered the LORD, and said, I know that thou canst do every thing, and that no thought can be withholden from thee. Who is he that hideth counsel without knowledge? therefore have I uttered that I understood not; things too wonderful for me, which I knew not (Job 42:1–3).

He then says he will speak. "Hear, I beseech thee, and I will speak: I will demand of thee, and declare thou unto me" (v. 4). His speech was brief: "I have heard of thee by the hearing of the ear: but now

mine eye seeth thee. Wherefore I abhor myself, and repent in dust and ashes" (vv. 5–6).

That was what God had been waiting for. He now turns his attention to the three critics.

> And it was so, that after the LORD had spoken these words unto Job, the LORD said to Eliphaz the Temanite, My wrath is kindled against thee, and against thy two friends: for ye have not spoken of me the thing that is right, as my servant Job hath. Therefore take unto you now seven bullocks and seven rams, and go to my servant Job, and offer up for yourselves a burnt offering; and my servant Job shall pray for you: for him will I accept: lest I deal with you after your folly, in that ye have not spoken of me the thing which is right, like my servant Job. So Eliphaz the Temanite and Bildad the Shuhite and Zophar the Naamathite went, and did according as the LORD commanded them: the LORD also accepted Job (vv. 7–9).

Negative sanctions came on them. Had it not been for Job, who served as their priest, greater negative sanctions would have been imposed by God.

God said nothing to Elihu. This indicates that He regarded Elihu as well-meaning, a spokesman for God who understood the sins of Job: (1) demanding an explanation from God; (2) calling God's judgment into question; (3) a short time perspective and impatience.

D. Restoration

"And the LORD turned the captivity of Job, when he prayed for his friends: also the LORD gave Job twice as much as he had before" (v. 10). As soon as it was clear that Job was in God's favor and on top of the economic pile, everyone wanted to be his friend.

> Then came there unto him all his brethren, and all his sisters, and all they that had been of his acquaintance before, and did eat bread with him in his house: and they bemoaned him, and comforted him over all the evil that the LORD had brought upon him: every man also gave him a piece of money, and every one an earring of gold (v. 11).

The world is filled with sycophants. Job now knew the degree of loyalty to him and what it would take to retain this loyalty. To this degree, he was better off than before. They, unlike him, conformed to Satan's description of Job. They were loyal for the benefits' sake.

"He had also seven sons and three daughters" (v. 13).

"After this lived Job an hundred and forty years, and saw his sons, and his sons' sons, even four generations" (v. 16). Job was the oldest

person in the Bible after Moses' declaration of mankind's new, shortened life span (Ps. 90:10).

Conclusion

God is absolutely sovereign over the creation. He is absolutely sovereign over judgment in history. He is God, and man is not. He owes men no explanations. His dispenses sanctions as He sees fit, according to His will.

Job became again the great beneficiary of God's grace. He had gone through a great trial. This trial was necessary to put Satan in his place, which was never revealed to Job. It was also necessary for putting Job's three critics in their places. It was necessary finally to put Job in his place.

Then there were his first 10 children and all but four of his former servants. Their deaths were necessary to convey a theological truth to mankind, a truth encapsulated by a layman, Otto Scott. "God is no buttercup."

CONCLUSION

> *This is the portion of a wicked man with God, and the heritage of oppressors, which they shall receive of the Almighty. If his children be multiplied, it is for the sword: and his offspring shall not be satisfied with bread. Those that remain of him shall be buried in death: and his widows shall not weep. Though he heap up silver as the dust, and prepare raiment as the clay; He may prepare it, but the just shall put it on, and the innocent shall divide the silver.*
>
> JOB 27:13–17

At no time did Job believe that God does not impose negative historical sanctions on the wicked. He believed that the wealth of the sinner is laid up for the just. He doubted that this system of sanctions was being applied fairly to him, but he was incorrect. "And the LORD turned the captivity of Job, when he prayed for his friends: also the LORD gave Job twice as much as he had before" (Job 42:10).

A. Job's Children

What is clear in the Book of Job is that this system of historical sanctions did not apply to Job's servants and his first 10 children. There is no escape from this conclusion. They were under Job's covenantal authority, and they perished because of this. *His righteousness doomed them*. God turned Satan loose on them in order to prove a point. There was no protection for them. There was no covenantal predictability at the end of their lives. Their time ran out before the experiment ended.

They did not die by chance. They died by design. Their deaths have come down through history as a great anomaly. But if this is an anomaly, it is an anomaly based on a predictable pattern. *The deviation from the pattern of historical sanctions is what makes their deaths covenantally relevant*. A day like that is not statistically likely. Its abnormality points to the providence of God. This providence includes God's

right to kill you for His own amusement. He was playing with Satan, goading him. Part of God's playfulness resulted in a lot of deaths. This is the God of the Bible.

Christians do not want to think of God in this way. Such a God is an affront to their concept of God. It was an affront to Job's concept of God, too. Job made this plain to his visitors. This is why God finally presented Himself to Job and asked him pages of rhetorical questions about His power compared to Job's. God is not capricious. God is sovereign. He does not answer to creatures. Creatures answer to God. As Paul wrote to the church at Rome,

> And not only this; but when Rebecca also had conceived by one, even by our father Isaac; (For the children being not yet born, neither having done any good or evil, that the purpose of God according to election might stand, not of works, but of him that calleth;) It was said unto her, The elder shall serve the younger. As it is written, Jacob have I loved, but Esau have I hated.
>
> What shall we say then? Is there unrighteousness with God? God forbid. For he saith to Moses, I will have mercy on whom I will have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I will have compassion. So then it is not of him that willeth, nor of him that runneth, but of God that sheweth mercy. For the scripture saith unto Pharaoh, Even for this same purpose have I raised thee up, that I might shew my power in thee, and that my name might be declared throughout all the earth. Therefore hath he mercy on whom he will have mercy, and whom he will he hardeneth.
>
> Thou wilt say then unto me, Why doth he yet find fault? For who hath resisted his will? Nay but, O man, who art thou that repliest against God? Shall the thing formed say to him that formed it, Why hast thou made me thus? Hath not the potter power over the clay, of the same lump to make one vessel unto honour, and another unto dishonour? (Rom. 9:10–21).

This passage is an affront to most Christians. It does not conform to their concept of God.

B. God's Sovereignty and Predictability

We learn two fundamental principles in the story of Job.

1. God is absolutely sovereign.
2. God is not absolutely predictable by men.

The second principle is implied by the first. God used unpredictable historical sanctions as a way to persuade Job of the first principle.

Satan understood the first principle. He knew that he could not interfere with Job apart from God's permission. He believed that Job

was predictable. Anyway, he spoke as if he did. He did not suggest that God was predictable. He believed that God was upholding Job. That alone made Job predictable. God called Satan's bluff. Twice.

The three critics believed that God is absolutely predictable. They also attributed to covenantal law an absolute quality that belongs only to God. By means of their observation of the negative sanctions, they drew conclusions about why those sanctions had been applied by God. There was only one possible explanation, they believed: sin in Job's life. Job denied this. The critics then escalated their accusations.

They believed that men can gain knowledge of God's motivations as well as other men's spiritual condition merely by observing the sanctions. To this extent, they believed that they gained authority over Job. They would assess his degree of sin, on behalf of God. They believed in the fixed relationship between law and sanctions.

Satan believed the same thing. He believed that God's positive sanctions were the sole basis of Job's obedience. The critics believed that God's negative sanctions were sole proof of Job's disobedience. Both Satan and the critics allowed their judgment to be governed exclusively by God's historical sanctions. Satan was wrong. The critics were wrong.

God's demonstration that Satan was wrong became the basis of the critics' conclusion that Job was sinful. They did not know that God's imposition of negative sanctions served a higher purpose: the public humiliation of Satan. God had goaded him into making a challenge. He then allowed Satan to impose extreme negative sanctions. Satan was ruthless; he was determined to prove his point regarding Job's sole motivation. Satan's degree of ruthlessness led the three critics to draw an inaccurate conclusion: Job had been in sin.

C. The Limits of Predictability

Both Satan and the critics had a theory of probability that turned out to be incorrect. Satan thought Job was predictable. The critics thought God is predictable. Satan drew conclusions about what Job would do. The critics drew conclusions about what Job must have done. The conclusions were wrong.

God retained His sovereignty in all of this. He did not regard His positive sanctions as the basis of Job's obedience. He knew that Job's motivation was ethical rather than economic. God also retained His sovereignty by the imposition of negative sanctions on Job. His system of historical causation reflected His commitment to His own

agenda, which included a public challenge to Satan. His agenda here was of greater importance than the predictability of His sanctions. In short, *because God is sovereign, His historical sanctions are not*. He does not transfer His sovereignty to a system of written law and supernatural sanctions that is capable of being understood comprehensively by man. *The legal order is not a tool by which men can gain control over God*.

There was a cartoon in the late 1960s. It showed two rats in a cage. There was a large lever and also a slot extending into the cage. One rat said to the other, "I have this psychologist trained. Every time I press this lever, he sends food pellets down the slot." This is legalistic man's view of God, authority, law, sanctions, and time.

God's covenantal law-order is sufficiently predictable to produce respect for both the law and for the God who enforces it. Leviticus 26 and Deuteronomy 28 are the primary passages in the Pentateuch that describe the structure of the sanctions. These results apply to the society at large. That is, *the sanctions apply to a large number of people*. They are predictable within a society in much the same way as statistics applies to large numbers of people. The predictability of the sanctions is sufficient for people to assess the community's degree of conformity to the law. But, even here, there is a delay of time. In the interim, the law-order does not seem predictable. Asaph commented on this in Psalm 73.

> For I was envious at the foolish, when I saw the prosperity of the wicked. For there are no bands in their death: but their strength is firm. They are not in trouble as other men; neither are they plagued like other men. Therefore pride compasseth them about as a chain; violence covereth them as a garment. Their eyes stand out with fatness: they have more than heart could wish. They are corrupt, and speak wickedly concerning oppression: they speak loftily. They set their mouth against the heavens, and their tongue walketh through the earth. Therefore his people return hither: and waters of a full cup are wrung out to them. And they say, How doth God know? and is there knowledge in the most High? Behold, these are the ungodly, who prosper in the world; they increase in riches (Ps. 73:3–12).

The sanctions were not random, Asaph said. They were perverse. Bad guys finished first. But the positive sanctions were part of a long-term pattern. Solomon later announced this pattern. "A good man leaveth an inheritance to his children's children: and the wealth of the sinner is laid up for the just" (Prov. 13:22).[1] Asaph noted this. "Surely

1. Gary North, *Wisdom and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Proverbs* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2007] 2012), ch. 41.

thou didst set them in slippery places: thou castedst them down into destruction. How are they brought into desolation, as in a moment! they are utterly consumed with terrors" (Ps. 73:18–19).[2]

Americans have a saying: "He gave them enough rope to hang themselves." It applies to the system of sanctions described in Leviticus 26 and Deuteronomy 28. It does not apply to Meredith G. Kline's concept of ethical causation. "And meanwhile it [the common grace order] must run its course within the uncertainties of the mutually conditioning principles of common grace and common curse, prosperity and adversity being experienced in a manner largely unpredictable because of the inscrutable sovereignty of the divine will that dispenses them in mysterious ways."[3]

D. Economic Sanctions

Deuteronomy's sanctions include economics in the narrow sense, such as money, but also in the broad sense: people's goals in life. Goals are ends for which we sacrifice consumption in the present. We buy them, in other words. The Mosaic law specified a law-order in which the sanctions rewarded ethical behavior and penalized unethical behavior. The goal of the Mosaic civil law was a decrease in unethical behavior. "And all Israel shall hear, and fear, and shall do no more any such wickedness as this is among you" (Deut. 13:11).

The predictability of sanctions furthers the commitment of righteous people to conform themselves to God's Bible-revealed standards. Positive economic sanctions increase their authority in society. These sanctions provide capital, which is a tool of dominion. But there is an ethical threat in all systems of positive sanctions. The sanctions can become ends in themselves. This was Satan's accusation against Job. Satan was unimpressed with Job's ethical behavior. He told God, "Hast not thou made an hedge about him, and about his house, and about all that he hath on every side? thou hast blessed the work of his hands, and his substance is increased in the land. But put forth thine hand now, and touch all that he hath, and he will curse thee to thy face" (Job 1:10–11). God removed the hedge as a way to demonstrate that Job was not in it for the positive sanctions. Satan was thwarted by this demonstration.

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2. Gary North, *Confidence and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Psalms* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, 2012), ch. 18.

3. Meredith G. Kline, "Comments on an Old-New Error," *Westminster Theological Journal*, XLI (Fall 1978), p. 184.

Thwarting Satan was more important to God than maintaining the hedge. This is why the Book of Job is so disturbing to covenant-keepers. It shows, beyond a shadow of doubt, that *God has an agenda that is much broader than providing benefits to covenant-keepers.* Readers can rejoice retroactively with Job in the birth of children 11 through 20, but this does not resurrect children one through 10. As for the deceased faithful herdsmen, nothing is said of them in Chapter 42. They were grist for God's mill. They were pawns in God's game of cosmic chess with Satan. If they were pawns, then what about you?

Job's critics were very concerned about their own status. If Job was not in misery as a result of some hidden sin, then they were in much greater jeopardy than he was. They could not match him in the perfection contest, yet here he was in the pit. If God would do this to a perfect man, what was He willing to do to run-of-the mill covenant-keepers? They had to defend the predictability of the sanctions, because, if the sanctions are not predictable, covenant-keepers are at risk. Bad things could overtake them at any time.

This is why the Book of Job has always been a puzzle for covenant-keepers. Most covenant-keepers want to believe in the efficacy of their works. They want to believe that bad guys finish last. They want to believe that honesty is the best policy—not simply for ethics' sake, but also for personal prosperity's sake.

Conclusion

The arguments back and forth produced no reconciliation. The intervention of God did.

The participants were not told about the interaction between God and Satan which began this book. The reader knows; the participants didn't. The reader sees what God's hidden agenda was; the participants didn't.

The theological issue dividing the participants was the doctrine of predictable historical sanctions. Are they predictable? Job said they are, but not in his case. The three critics said they were, and this included Job's case. Elihu said they are, but not in Job's case. God did not address this issue. He affirmed His own sovereignty, which all of the participants had affirmed.

The sovereignty of God could be exercised to make the sanctions predictable within a specific time frame. This is not the case, as the Book of Job makes clear. The Book of Job illustrates a neglected passage in Deuteronomy.

> The secret things belong unto the LORD our God: but those things which are revealed belong unto us and to our children for ever, that we may do all the words of this law. And it shall come to pass, when all these things are come upon thee, the blessing and the curse, which I have set before thee, and thou shalt call them to mind among all the nations, whither the LORD thy God hath driven thee, And shalt return unto the LORD thy God, and shalt obey his voice according to all that I command thee this day, thou and thy children, with all thine heart, and with all thy soul (Deut. 29:29–30:2).

Meredith G. Kline taught that all this has been put aside under the New Covenant. He never came close to proving this exegetically. He never suggested what the implications are for social theory. But he knew that the annulment of systematic historical sanctions would undermine the case for postmillennialism. *There is no biblical case for the triumph of God's comprehensive kingdom in history if God's historical sanctions are not tied to biblical law*. Without the connection between biblical law and predictable historical sanctions, there is no biblical case for distinguishing the performance of God's kingdom from autonomous man's kingdom. History would be covenantally random. This is Kline's theological position. It is not mine. It was not Job's in Chapter 42.

The story of Job is the precursor of the story of Jesus. To thwart Satan, God the Father placed Jesus under negative sanctions that He did not deserve. He cut Himself off from Jesus, just as God had cut Himself off from Job. "And about the ninth hour Jesus cried with a loud voice, saying, Eli, Eli, lama sabachthani? that is to say, My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?" (Matt. 27:46). All this was preparatory for a great reversal.

> And Jesus came and spake unto them, saying, All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth. Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost: Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and, lo, I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world. Amen (Matt. 28:18–20).

The judicial basis of dominion in the New Covenant era—the Great Commission[4]—was the temporary unpredictability of the sanctions. But the system of sanctions is in fact predictable. Had Satan seen this, he might not have inspired the enemies of Christ to bring

4. Kenneth L. Gentry, Jr., *The Greatness of the Great Commission: The Christian Enterprise in a Fallen World* (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, 1990).

Him under historical sanctions. Satan was as wrong about Christ's response as he had been about Job's response. The historical sanctions prevailed. Jesus died, not because of His sins, but because of the sins of man. The negative sanction did not last long: three days.